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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2306
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2415
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RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4471
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4946
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#) [VZ](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: GOB PRAISES POTUS LATAM TOUR; PREPARES FOR CHAVEZ
VISIT

REF: LA PAZ 644

Classified By: ECOPOL COUNSELOR ANDREW ERICKSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and
(d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera announced March 8 that President Morales will not travel to Buenos Aires to join Hugo Chavez at his anti-American party. The VP added that President Bush's trip to the region "is a good signal that President Bush is more concerned about the South and is closer to the continent." Garcia Linera added that Hugo Chavez' scheduled March 10 visit is a "journey of solidarity" with Bolivia. President Morales will host a public event for Chavez in the MAS stronghold of El Alto. A visit to flood-ravaged Trinidad, in the Beni department, is also in the works, although that will have to be stage-managed carefully, given considerable anti-Morales feeling in many quarters there. For now, senior levels of the GOB have gotten our message to tone down the GOB's anti-American rhetoric (reftel). But given Chavez's considerable personal sway over President Morales, we should expect some rhetoric over this weekend. End summary.

RARE PUBLIC PRAISE FROM THE GOB...

12. (U) Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera told the press on March 8 that President Bush's trip to the region "is a good signal that President Bush is more concerned about the South and is closer to the continent." Garcia Linera went on to say that he hopes President Bush's tour serves "to make a change of direction and renew ties with Latin America." Separately, VFM Hugo Fernandez remarked that he expects "the visit to bring benefits for Latin American countries."

WHILE PREPARING FOR CHAVEZ

13. (U) In the same press conference, Garcia Linera said that President Morales would not go to Argentina to participate in President Hugo Chavez' "anti-imperialist" festival. The vice president said the GOB was putting the finishing touches on plans for the March 10 arrival of President Chavez and said Chavez' visit is a "journey of solidarity" with Bolivia. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs contact told Emboff on March 9 that Presidents Morales will host Chavez in the MAS stronghold of El Alto as well as visiting flood-ravaged Trinidad, Beni. The Beni visit will have to be stage-managed carefully, however, given the widespread unpopularity of the President there.

14. (C) Indeed, the press reports the GOB is trucking in cocaleros to El Alto and Trinidad to participate in the public events. President Chavez, in an interview with Bolivian state run tv, has promised to bring "a confrontational message" to Bolivia. Vice President Garcia Linera privately told the Ambassador March 8 (reftel) that he has tried to orient the Trinidad portion of the trip towards humanitarian assistance, and it is notable that the GOB is hosting the Chavez visit to El Alto in a rather small stadium, perhaps out of concern that Chavez will not draw the crowds he prefers to see.

COMMENT

15. (C) President Morales' announcement from his Japan that he would not to go to Argentina is notable, as is the fact he announced it prior to leaving Japan. He arrived in Bolivia

March 9 and could have gone to President Chavez' rally if he chose to do so. Apparently, his decision not to go seems to have been a conscious decision to stay clear. The two events planned for Chavez here are being managed with some care. The Trinidad visit should be mostly a flyover and a visit to groups who can be relied upon to respond positively to Morales, Chavez, and the promise of further aid. Perhaps most interesting is the GOB's decision to book a small venue in reliably pro-Evo El Alto. Whether this reflects a GOB decision to downplay the event or GOB concerns that it can't draw a sufficiently large crowd remains to be seen. Nonetheless, given Chavez's demonstrated influence over Evo at past joint events, we should expect some rhetoric from Morales, not just from Chavez, over the weekend. End Comment.
GOLDBERG